

# PALM SPRINGS SENTINEL

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## **Letter from the Fire Chief**

### **Dear Neighbor:**

When a fire starts in Palm Springs, most likely within its 28-square-mile urban area, the Palm Springs Fire Department's goal is an immediate, full-force response that keeps a small fire from becoming a major conflagration.

The department will be challenged to achieve that goal if it becomes necessary to implement the Contingency Budget Plan approved by the City Council in September. And that could happen if voters on November 2 fail to pass a temporary increase in the Utility User's Tax.

Palm Springs has a fire suppression force of 56 trained individuals. Last year, the Fire Department dispatched equipment and personnel on 6,500 calls. The Contigency Budget Plan would reduce that number by six, and also eliminate the Reserve Fire fighter program, which provides nine oncall firefighters. Additionally, the department would institute a rotating fire station closure system that will shut down one of the city's five primary stations for a 24-hour period.

Closing a station reduces the number of onduty city fire fighters from 14 to 12, or one engine company. The department's response may be slower, which could result in fire and rescue operations that are, at times, defensive in nature, rather than offensive. It also means relying more on mutual aid resources and off-duty firefighters—an overtime cost issue.

The Contingency Budget cuts could impact insurance premiums paid by business owners. If the staff cuts and station closures cause the City's ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating to increase from its current Class 3 to Class 4 or 5, insurance rates could in crease for commercial buildings. The City is scheduled to be graded in December.

If residents fail to pass Measure V on November 2, there will be noticeable changes in the Fire Department. Residents will notice a reduction in fire inspections and public education programs. Moreover, a reduction in staff could increase the department's response time and limit our ability to respond to simultaneous emergencies.

As your Fire Chief, I want to reassure you that regardless of what happens on November 2, your Fire Department is committed to serving the community.

Sincerely yours,

Illale II Those Blake Goetz, Fire Chief

## **PUBLIC SAFETY: MEASURE V vs. THE CONTINGENCY BUDGET**

place a high value on public safety programs. The community's quality of life is enhanced greatly because the Police Department and Fire Department have dedicated, highly-trained personnel equipped to respond quickly and competently to incidents large or small.

The dedication and the training of our public safety personnel will not change if Measure V fails on November 2, and the city implements the City Council-approed Contingency Budget Plan. However, response times may increase, and in some minor cases residents may have to go to the Police Department to file a report.

The Contingency Budget Plan reduces staff and programs in every city department. Fire Chief Blake Goetz' roster of 56 fire suppression personnel will be reduced by six. The nine-person Reserve Firefighter Program will also be eliminated.

Police Chief Gary Jeandron is proud of his "full-service" department. The department has a complement of 92 sworn and 56 classified personnel at full strength. However, the Contigency Budget Plan proposes a reduction of 10 positions (eight police officers, two community service officers), and this will have an impact on policing in the city.

Both Jeandron and Goetz say reaction times

In the City of Palm Springs, most residents will be greater. With a 24-hour rotating closure of the five main fire stations, distances will increase and equipment and personnel may not be onscene as quickly. There will be great reliance on mutual aid resources from other cities and offduty firefighter recalls.

> Fewer police officers may limit the department's ability to respond to misdemeanor crimes, minor traffic accidents and many narcotics violations. Officers will be less involved in Neighborhood Watch and in meetings of MainStreet, Uptown, and neighborhood associations.

> The reduction in force also means police officers rather than community service officers will have to do more reports. And more time on reports means less time in the community.

> The alternative to the Contingency Budget Plan is Measure V. On November 2, Presidential Election voters will have the opportunity to impose an additional monthly tax surcharge of approximately \$7.20 in lieu of budget cuts. MeasureV increases the Utility User's Tax (UUT), which is applied to home use of electricity, natural gas and intrastate telephone services, from five to eight percent. The increase would be limited to three years and once it expires, the UUT rate will revert to five percent.

## **ISSUES AT A GLANCE**

### **MEASURE V** In crease Utility User's Tax from 5% to 8% for three years

- Maintain current number of police officers
- Maintain current number of firefighters
- Keep all fire stations open full-time

### **CONTINGENCY BUDGET PLAN** To be implemented if Measure V does not pass

- Eliminate 10 police officers • Eliminate six firefighters
- Close fire stations on a rotating basis
- Reduce library hours of operation
- Reduce community center hours of operation
- Stop steam cleaning of Downtown sidewalks
- Stop afternoon trash pickup Downtown

Sometimes there are no easy answers in the midst of the complexities of creating or revising a budget, whether it is a city or a family spending plan. But Measure V, which will institute a temporary increase in the city's Utility User's Tax (UUT), is a possible answer to solving the City's budget shortfall.

That increase will amount to about \$7.20 a month on a household's electricity, natural gas and intrastate telephone services. The surcharge would first show up on utility bills sent out in February 2005. The surcharge would remain in effect for three years. At that point, city officials believe that additional cost savings and

improvements in the economy will offset the need for the additional revenue generated by Measure V.

The city's finance director says the UUT currently generates \$5.8 million, or 13 percent of the city's General Fund budget. The UUT increase would generate an additional \$3.5 million in revenue per year.

Much like revising a household budget when the price of a gallon of gas increases or food prices go up, the city budget needs additional revenue to make up for a shortfall caused by rising costs. Unlike most family spending plans, the city's budget shortfall can also be traced, in large part,

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# **PALM SPRINGS**

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# CITY ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD ON NOVEMBER 2

By any measure, Tuesday, November 2 is an important day. What voters decide in the upcoming Presidential Election will help set the direction for this country for the next four years, and maybe more.

Decisions made by Palm Springs voters on a variety of ballot measures will also impact the future course of events in one of America's great destination cities. One of those, Measure V, allows city residents to make a decision that will help determine what this city looks like and how it operates in the years ahead.

As would be expected in a democracy, there is not unanimity on every issue. That is the case with Measure V, which proposes to increase the monthly Utility User's Tax from five to eight percent for a period not to exceed three years. The additional surcharge is expected to cost the average household \$7.20 every month.

City officials, having already been through opinion on Election Day.

budget-reduction exercises for more than a year, say that voter approval of Measure V would mean an additional \$3.5 million in annual revenue. They say that failure of Measure V would require implementation of a Contingency Budget Plan, which calls for eliminating 27.5 staff positions and eliminating or reducing programs and services.

Some believe there are other areas where extensive cost reductions would bring the city budget into balance. For example, restructuring the city's health benefits plan, requiring city employees to contribute to their retirement plan, and eliminating the police department's take home patrol car program have been recommended by the city's Budget Task Force and others as possible alternatives to Measure V.

Regardless of your fiscal beliefs, we encourage you and your fellow citizens to express your opinion on Election Day.

# MEASURE V: A WAY TO MAINTAIN CURRENT SERVICES

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to the State of California's ongoing practice of taking revenues away from cities.

The current five percent UUT rate is less than the average levy for the 150 California cities that depend on UUT revenue. In some cities it has been extended to services like water, sewer, cable television, and even cellular telephone services. However, the city is not suggesting that these additional services be included in our UUT.

Should city residents fail to pass Measure V, the City Council is expected to implement a Contingency Budget Plan. That plan calls for reductions in all city departments, including police and fire. It would mean eliminating 27.5 staff positions—that's in addition to the 20.5 non-public safety positions cut in the past two years. It would save the city more than \$3.5 million.

## SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA: INICIATIVA DE LEY V vs. EL PRESUPUESTO

La mayoría de los residentes de la Ciudad de Palm Springs asignan un alto valor a los programas de seguridad pública. La calidad de vida de la comunidad se ve ampliamente mejorada debido a la dedicación del personal altamente entrenado de los Departamentos de Policía y de Bomberos, equipado para responder rápidamente y de manera competente a incidentes mayores o menores.

Dicha dedicación y entrenamiento del personal al servicio de la seguridad pública no variará aunque el próximo 2 de noviembre la Iniciativa de Ley V no se apruebe, y la ciudad implemente el Plan de presupuesto para contingencia aprobado por el Concejo Municipal. Sin embargo, los tiempos de respuesta aumentarán y en casos de menor importancia los residentes tendrán que acercarse al Departamento de Policía para presentar una denuncia.

El Plan de presupuesto para contingencia reduce el personal y los programas en cada departamento de la ciudad. La cuadrilla de 54 bomberosal mando del Jefe de Bomberos Blake Goetz se vería reducida en 6 puestos. Se

eliminaría el Programa de Bomberos de Reserva menos involucrados en la Vigilancia en el compuesto por nueve personas. Vecindario, en las reuniones de la calle principal

El Jefe de Policía, Gary Jeandron, está orgulloso de su departamento de servicio integral. Pero con un personal compuesto por 92 o ficiales en servicio bajo juramento y 56 oficiales clasificados de dedicación completa, una reducción de 10 puestos (ocho oficiales de policía y dos o ficiales de servicio comunitario) tendría un impacto sobre el servicio policial de la ciudad.

Tanto Jeandron como Goetz afirman que los tiempos de respuesta a incidentes serán mayores. A partir del cierre rotativo de una estación por día entre las cinco estaciones de bomberos, las distancias serán mayores y el personal con el equipo no llegará al lugar de los hechos de manera tan inmediata. Nuestro servicio dependerá en gran medida de los recursos de ayuda mutua proveniente de otras ciudades y del llamado a bomberos que no estén en servicio.

Menos oficiales de policía implica menor respuesta a actos delictivos menores, accidentes de tránsito de menor importancia y ciertas infracciones por narcóticos. Los oficiales estarán

menos involucrados en la Vigilancia en el Vecindario, en las reuniones de la calle principal (Main Street) de la zona residencial de la ciudad (Uptown) y en las reuniones del vecindario.

La reducción de la fuerza policial implica que los oficiales de policía deberán encargarse de completar más informes, tarea actualmente a cargo de los oficiales de servicio comunitario. Y más tiempo en los informes significa menos tiempo en la comunidad.

La alternativa al Plan de presupuesto para contingencia es la Iniciativa de Ley V. El 2 de noviembre próximo, los votantes de elecciones presidenciales tendrán la oportunidad de imponer un recargo adicional mensual impositivo de aproximadamente \$7,20 en lugar de recortes presupuestarios. La Iniciativa de Ley V aumenta el impuesto del usuario de servicios públicos (UUT), que se aplica al uso doméstico de los servicios de electricidad, gas natural, telefonía local, de un cinco a un ocho por ciento. Al proponer esta iniciativa de ley para votación, el Concejo Municipal decidió que el aumento se limitaría a tres años.

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For more information, please visit the city's website: www.ci.palm-springs.ca.us



